

CONGRESSMAN SHERWOOD BOEHLERT (R-NY)
FLOOR STATEMENT ON NASA AUTHORIZATION
July 22, 2005

Mr. Chairman:

I rise in strong support of H.R. 3070.

Let me begin by thanking Ken Calvert, the chairman of our Space and Aeronautics Subcommittee and the lead author of this bill. Without Chairman Calvert's steadfast determination, insight and openness to compromise, we would not be here today.

I also want to thank my ranking Member, Bart Gordon, and our Subcommittee ranking Member, Mr. Udall, for their leadership and willingness to compromise. And I want to thank all the Members of the Committee on both sides of the aisle who have contributed to this bill. It is a true team effort, and it shows what Congress can accomplish if we work in an open-minded and cooperative manner.

Now, I've opened my statement focusing on compromise, but I don't want anyone to think that this bill represents some kind of random hodge-podge of competing views. H.R. 3070 is built on firm, central principles that will give clear direction to NASA.

What are those principles? First, Congress endorses the President's Vision for Space Exploration. The United States will work to return to the moon by 2020, and then will move on to other destinations. We will build a new Crew Exploration Vehicle that, among its other tasks, will service the International Space Station. And the bill allows the Space Shuttle to be retired no later than 2010, which we must do if the space program is to continue to make progress.

Obviously, we hope and pray for the safe return to flight of the Space Shuttle, now scheduled for next Tuesday. The Space Shuttle is a magnificent machine, and our current space program is dependent on it, but it is not our future in space.

The second principle on which this bill is founded – and it is every bit as essential as the first principle – is that NASA is a multi-mission agency with vital responsibilities in space science, earth science and aeronautics. Those programs are NASA's most successful efforts; they bring enormous economic and intellectual benefits; and they create every bit as much excitement among students and the general public as do the human space flight programs.

This bill recognizes the centrality of these programs, and authorizes them at a greater level than the Administration has proposed. The bill specifically endorses a Hubble Space Telescope repair mission, assuming the NASA Administrator determines that the mission would not impose any unreasonable risks. And the bill treats these programs as priorities to be evaluated on their own merits, not in terms of the human space flight program.

The third principle behind this bill is an understanding that NASA is in a period of transition and that Congress needs much more information before we can make detailed decision on the future of the agency's programs.

For that reason, the bill asks NASA to develop a vision for aeronautics, a prioritized list of science missions, and a plan for its workforce and facilities. We require more joint planning with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and the Department of Energy.

We explicitly list the numerous basic reports that Administrator Griffin has promised to provide by September, including most significantly reports on the number of remaining Shuttle flights and their mission, the final configuration of the Space Station, the cost of the Crew Exploration Vehicle, the plan for what we will do on the moon, and the plan for Project Prometheus. And that's not even the full list. We have a lot of oversight work ahead of us.

The fourth principle of the bill is that NASA has to try new ways of doing business if it is to remain innovative. This is a point that former Chairman Rohrabacher always hammered home, and it is an emphasis of Chairman Calvert, as well. NASA has to be open to entrepreneurs. NASA needs to see how much can be gained from an expanded prize program, which is authorized by this bill. NASA needs to work with international partners on the Vision for Space Exploration.

So this is a bill built on solid principles that will give NASA a solid foundation from which to launch its many missions. We can all be proud of our space program, which has been a symbol of, and contributor to the nation's technological prowess. This bipartisan bill will ensure that that remains the case. I urge my colleagues to support it.